



Maricopa County Animal Care & Control

Thinking of adopting a Dalmatian



With the popularity of Disney's 100 DALMATIANS movies, another generation of kids will be begging their parents for a black or liver polka dotted pup. Before succumbing to your children's wishes, take some time to learn about Dalmatians to determine if they are the right breed for your family.

- The Dalmatian was used for many purposes throughout the years - ratter, bird dog, trail hound, draft dog, shepherd-but his most important occupation was as a coach dog. As such, the Dal would run for miles with the coach, protecting the carriage's inhabitants and horses from highwaymen and the like. This protective nature can cause trouble when improperly directed or controlled and bites can result. Suspiciousness, shy-sharpness (biting out of fear) and over-protectiveness are evident in some dogs of this breed.
- All the Dalmatian's jobs demanded speed, strength and endurance. While few Dals today work at more than companionship, they still need to expend all that energy. This breed makes a great buddy for joggers or cyclists. If not given enough exercise (1-2 hours a day is recommended), a young, unsupervised Dal can be quite destructive.
- Without early obedience training, many Dalmatians will pull on leash, making walks unpleasant for those attempting to control these strong athletes. They can also prove to be unruly and stubborn, so puppy kindergarten classes are highly recommended. Most are quick learners when given the chance.
- Hearing disorders are prevalent in the breed. Two recent studies that tested almost 2,000 Dalmatians found that nearly 30% had hearing disorders - 8.1% were totally deaf and 21.6% were deaf in one ear. A brainstem auditory emission response (BAER) test should be performed to rule out deafness. While a deaf dog may be a suitable companion for an adult household, it is generally too skittish to be comfortable around rambunctious children and may become snappish.
- Dalmatians are prone to bladder stones (uroliths) and some have a metabolic defect unique to the breed that results in a high level of uric acid excretion in the urine. This has been linked to a dermatitis that appears as hive-like eruptions of the skin. These eruptions last longer than true hives and make the coat look patchy and discolored. Those afflicted may appear restless or irritable.
- The sleek, glossy coat of a Dalmatian is easy to care for but will need frequent brushing with a rubber curry brush or hound glove. They are constant shedders and without consistent brushing, your home will soon be covered in short black (or liver) and white hairs. It has been this writer's experience that a small percentage of people not usually allergic to dogs will have a skin reaction to Dalmatian hair. Make sure all family members get a chance to cuddle with any potential adoption candidates before bringing them home in order to rule out any allergic responses.

For more information on animal care, behavior or AC&C programs,
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